



PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

Nicholasville Police Officer Billy King

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As a school resource officer, you know you're doing something right when faculty, students and parents all say they sleep better at night knowing you're in the hallways daily.

Others apparently feel the same way. As a school resource officer at East Jessamine High School, Nicholasville Police Officer Billy King recently captured one of only 15 national "Exemplary School Safety" awards at the annual Safe Schools Advocacy Council Conference in Las Vegas. The 14-year law enforcement veteran has spent seven years at the school, becoming a helping hand, a listening ear and a friendly smile to the students who come to class each day.

My days aren't anything typical. It's kind of like normal police work in that, for the most part, you never really know what's going to go on day to day. It has been said that schools reflect the community in which they are and they are a city in their own. There is a tremendous amount of truth to that statement. Most any problem that you have in an adult world in your community, those problems are going to be drawn into your schools.

When our program first began, I thought I had made a huge mistake. No one was used to police officers being in the school at that time. Our program was brand new — we as the police weren't used to being there, the faculty and staff weren't used to it and the students surely were not used to seeing us walk around. So, that first year when school started, I may as well have been on the moon. Nobody wanted to talk to me. But as time went on, I made some relationships and the faculty and students saw my genuine interest. One thing led to another and now a lot of times I have to say, 'You're going to have to take a number and wait,' because it's really busy inside my office most days.

The adjustment to working with the students was kind of difficult, but I think it was made a little bit easier for me because I am a dad. My son just graduated from EJHS last year and is getting ready to go to ECU, so I've had him in the school. My daughter is a current junior at EJHS, so I have had some practice talking with teenagers. I owe a part of making my transition easier to them because all their friends instantly

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became my friends. If you build good relationships from the beginning with the students you have contact with, it doesn't take very long for them to get that information to other students that they have a positive relationship with you.

We have about 1,150 students in my building and all 1,150 of those kids have total access to me. They know if they need something that I am there for them. I think they trust me and I have a lot of them come to me about personal issues and things that are going on in their lives and they're just looking for advice. Or they just pop in the office and want to talk and hang out, which I'm totally good with that.

The number one thing that keeps me coming back has to be my love and interest in the children. I am vested in the school. I care about all those kids and I want to see them do well. A lot of times when I have to perform my law enforcement duties it hurts me more than it hurts them. I think the students can see that.

I really enjoy what I do. There are a lot of days that when I go home, I'm happy. I can say, 'Today was a good day. Today was a fun day.' In police work, that's hard to find. Usually when you go home at the end of the day, you have seen and dealt with a lot you would rather have not seen and dealt with.

Each year I have been there it has just gotten better and better. The freshman coming into high school have had an SRO now during their entire middle school career. Once they get to me they're already used to having a police officer in their school. They know by the time they get to me what to expect from police officers and I think it makes them coming to me a lot easier. It all starts with the program in the middle school. That really builds the foundation for our program.

I can honestly say the students I get the closest with are the ones who have gotten

in trouble. Our relationship begins that way, but it doesn't end that way. We wind up getting close and I check on them all the time. I'll talk to them and they know if they need me for anything that I'm there for them. Whether it's in the school, at home, out in the community or whatever, they will come to me with that stuff.

The award was a big surprise to me. I didn't know anything about it. I was contacted by our Sgt. Scott Harvey and he told me I had been submitted for and won a school safety award through the national school advocacy council. I was floored. I am very grateful to the faculty in the school and I can't say enough about the administration and teachers I work with at EJHS. They are awesome people and I feel so fortunate to get to work with them every day. Their investment into the students is tremendous.

I think the most important thing an SRO can do in the beginning of his or her program is to be honest with the students and the staff. I felt that it was crucial to our program from day one that to make the program a success was that they had to trust me. So I decided right then and there I was always going to shoot straight with them. It has made my job easier because the students know when I tell them something, that's what it is.

I have found that teenagers don't mind you holding them accountable for something if they know what's expected. If they know they weren't supposed to do something and you catch them at it, they know they screwed up. I tell them, 'If you do this, this is what's going to happen.' I handle the students with respect, so we have never had any issues. Like I said, those are the students who I usually wind up being the closest with by the time they graduate, and when I see them out they always come running up to me and hug me and ask how I'm doing. And that feels good. It really does. 🐾

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